

1.
QUESTIONS FROM MALAYSIA.
(to Khang)

(Kamma & Vipakka)

1 Q. about kamma: Is it due to environment or hereditary causes that one is born into various conditions.

Answer:


In conventional language and in science we use the word hereditary a lot. However, in order to know the truth we have to consider: what are the realities: the namas and rupas, and how are they conditioned. We have to consider conditions, and there are many different ones. The human being, what is it? Only different namas and different rupas which are conditioned by different kinds of conditions, working at different moments of our life. As to the first moment of life: nama and rupa are produced by kamma. This is one of the conditions and I should first explain a little more about kamma, which was one of your other questions.

Kamma. This is another word for volition, which is a mental factor (cetasika) arising with each citta. There are many kinds of volitions, depending on the citta it accompanies. When the citta is kusala citta, the volition or kamma is kusala and it can motivate good deeds. When the citta is akusala, the volition is also akusala, and it can motivate ill deeds. (There is also volition with the citta which are neither kusala or akusala, with the vipakacittas and kiriyacittas, but in those cases cetana or kamma has merely the task of coordinating the work of the other cetasikas which accompany a citta. When you want to explain kamma in simple terms, as you told me, you need not mention this .)

As you know, cittas change from moment to moment, they arise and fall away. Now the citta is kusala, then it is akusala. At the moment you are angry and you hit someone there is akusala volition which motivates the hitting. At such a moment you (but not really you, citta) forgot about kusala, and how different are the moments of kusala and akusala. At the moment you give, cetana is kusala, quite different. How then could one take volition for self, a person who directs? Nobody directing, only different moments of citta, arising because of different conditions.

Where do such ugly things as akusala cittas come from? Where do kusala cittas come from? When you are used to hitting other people you will see how this inclination comes up again and again. You have accumulated such tendency. ^{The way} you were in the past conditions how you are now. Each citta which arises falls away completely, but it conditions the next citta and this again the next. Thus it is possible that each citta carries in itself the potentials of good and bad deeds. We call this a person's character, but this is

only a conventional term. Character, hereditary causes, these terms are not clear, we should look at the real causes of phenomena.

Kamma can produce different results, in the form of rebirth (happy rebirth, unhappy rebirth) and also in the course of life: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, receiving bodily impressions, these are vipakacittas, cittas which are result of kamma. When a tree hits you, not the tree is the result of kamma, but the bodily pain, the citta which experiences that object. A tree may fall over two people, one may not have any bodily pain, the other may be hurt. Different kammās produce different vipakas. The thinking ^{with aversion} of what you experience  is not vipāka, it is akusala citta, another moment again. But we confuse the different moments. When doctor pricks you the aversion seems to be at the same time as the vipakacitta which experiences the hardness or heat, but they are all different cittas at different moments.

As to the environment into which one is born, that is not mere chance, it fits your kamma. The same is true as to the parents, the family. It fits one's kamma, kamma takes care of it so to say that birth takes place in such country, into such family. Nothing is by accident, everything which happens has conditions.

If you want to explain kamma and vipaka in very simple terms, you could say that the good deeds and the bad deeds you do bring good and bad results, they come so to say back to you in the form of results, sooner or later, somehow or other.

Q. Someone had an accident and his brain is damaged. Is that kamma, can it be cured?

A. The citta which experiences the unpleasant object is the result of akusala kamma, but we do not know whether it is a kamma of a former life or of this life. Different kammās find their opportunities to produce different results at different moments of our lives. Brain is rupa, it is composed of ... solidity, cohesion, motion, temperature and other rūpas. Brain does not think, brain does not know anything. However, rupas condition namas. It is nama which experiences, thinks, feels. When someone is what we call mad, there is still citta, so long as there is life. Citta and cetasikas. The family could even help such a person to do good deeds, but of course the conditions are not such that wisdom can be developed. But even when we are sane, consider how few moments of kusala, how many moments of akusala. And is there the development of satipatthana? So, whether someone is sane or not sane is a notion used in conventional language. We are all in a way not quite sane so long as we have

not attained enlightenment.

Q. How to explain in a simple way to others about rebirth. Is there an intermediary state before one is reborn?

A. There is today, and we know there was yesterday, then why doubt that there will be tomorrow?

Now more in detail: you do not doubt there is citta at this moment, be it citta which sees, or citta which hears or citta which thinks. The citta now has been conditioned by a previous citta, and this again by a previous one, and so on, until the first citta of this life. Also this one must have been conditioned, by a previous one, it succeeded the last citta of the past life. The present life followed upon the past life. In the same way the next life follows upon this life. The last citta of this life will be succeeded by another citta, which is the first citta of the next life. So long as there are conditions for life, that is, so long as we did not attain arahatship we will not be freed from the cycle of birth and death. Just as life goes on now from moment to moment, so it will go on in the future.

In which plane we will be reborn depends on the kamma which produces the next rebirth-consciousness; the rebirth-consciousness, the first citta of life is vipakacitta.

About the intermediary stage: from the foregoing it follows that there is no intermediary stage, citta succeeds citta, life succeeds life, no interruptions. It is possible that after this life there is rebirth in another plane and ^{that} life lasts very short, to be followed by another life in this plane, but who knows?

Q. What is dreaming? When we are asleep we are in bhavanga-state.

A. Not only when asleep there are bhavanga-cittas. (state is a word which is too static) There is seeing now, and then hearing, and these experiences are not mixed, they are definitely different experiences, we can recognize them as such. The cittas arising in the process of cittas experiencing visible object are separated ^(by bhavangacittas) from the cittas arising in the process experiencing sound. Bhavanga-cittas ^(are) cittas which do not have objects such as visible object or sound which impinge on one of the six doors time and again. Bhavanga-citta is the same type of citta as the rebirth-consciousness, it is vipaka produced by kamma. All the time through life they arise in between processes, they keep so to say the continuity in our life, which consists of cittas arising and falling away. When we are asleep there must be citta. When we are dreaming there are mostly akusala cittas, sometimes kusala cittas.

Cittas experience objects through the mind-door, there are processes of cittas. When we are not dreaming and in deep sleep, there are bhavanga-cittas, they experience the same object as the first citta in life, and this is the same object as experienced by the cittas arising shortly before dying in the past life. We do not know what this object is, but I would not say it is impossible to know, that is for those who have developed wisdom. We cannot speculate about that. But since we are born humans it has to be a pleasant object.

Why do we have to dream? It has to do with the bodily tiredness which induces sleep and very much with all our akusala inclinations, our worries, since we often dream about what we thought over during the day. It is very helpful to be mindful of nama and rupa before going to sleep.

Q. In order to attain enlightenment one must practice vipassana. Can one do sitting meditation, or awareness of the rise and fall of the abdomen? Or walking meditation? Or awareness of the movement of the footsole? Or just follow what you said in Buddhism in daily life ?

A. You sure should not follow anybody, people say many different things. But consider and check: does it help you to know better the nama or rupa which appears now, be it seeing, hearing, touching or hardness, or heat.

When you sit, is there seeing? When you walk is there seeing? There is seeing in our daily life. There is hearing, there is hardness, there are all the different namas and rupas appearing. There can be mindfulness of them if there is right understanding of them. It is listening and considering of what you heard about nama and rupa which can condition a kusala citta with awareness. We cannot have many kusala cittas, and so we cannot have many moments of awareness, it is not self. It is a sobhana cetasika, and how could there be

a self which orders awareness to come and perform its function? Sitting cannot induce it, walking cannot induce it, following the abdomen cannot induce it. Such actions which aim at inducing sati are motivated by desire for a lot of sati, they are akusala cittas. Since desire can be so subtle, and the accompanying feeling is pleasant or indifferent, it can be desire in disguise, it can seem calmness, but it is desire. That is why all such practices are so very dangerous. The more natural you are, the better for the right kind of sati.

You may know how few moments there is kusala citta in a day. You cannot force kusala, it is anatta, not self. You know also that studying Dhamma is a good condition for kusala, but even study of Dhamma is conditioned, maybe you studied in the past. Each kusala citta is accompanied by sati. There are many different kinds of sati. Sati remembers what is kusala. When you give, there is sati which remembers to give. When you abstain from lying there is sati which remembers to abstain, it is sati of sila. There is sati of samatha, tranquil meditation, it remembers the meditation object. There is sati in vipassana which is mindful of any nama or rupa appearing right now. This kind of sati has an object which is different from the other kinds of sati, sati of dāna, sati of sīla, sati of samatha, and it performs a different function. Still, we cannot choose what kusala to perform at which moment, it depends on conditions. All sorts of kusala are valuable, let us not despise any kind.

As regards samatha, this is a way to have kusala citta instead of akusala citta, it is wholesome. When you are very angry the whole day, you may see the value of kusala and the disadvantage of akusala. You may suddenly see the other person you are angry with as a human being ^{towards whom} you should have mettā. Mettā is very valuable, we should cultivate it in daily life. Maybe you have read about mettā and suddenly sati remembers. It helped me a lot that we discussed mettā so often in Sri Lanka. Or compassion. The one who treats you badly deserves compassion, he is really the loser, he makes himself unhappy.

The Buddha showed many meditation subjects and they are worked out in the commentary ^(the Visuddhimagga): 40 in all. They are so very well balanced,
 ————— they are conditions for kusala, if practised in the right way. One of them is mindfulness of breath (at the tip of the nose) and this is one of the most difficult ones. If we change it around to make it easier we . . . overshoot our target. What is the aim of this subject: to have kusala citta instead of attachment to our life, to our body, to our breath. One learns that our life to which we cling so much is dependant of this tiny rūpa which appears at the tip of the nose. If we say: o, well, this is too difficult, let us change it and follow the abdomen, —————→

but then one thinks of the whole body ^{one} makes it so important. It does not work, it is not the right practice of samatha, it induces attachment. —————→

There has to be ~~and this~~ right understanding of the meditation subject, conditions calm. For the development of metta you have to know what metta is, different from attachment to the people you are with. And metta and attachment can arise closely one after the other. Pañña is necessary to know the difference. Samatha is not: trying to concentrate; the concentration (which arises with every citta anyway) will grow together with the pañña of samatha, but it all depends how much accumulations one has for samatha.

Vipassanā is quite different. What has to be known in vipassanā? any reality which appears through one of the six doors, now. One nāma or rūpa at a time. While you are sitting, is there no hardness appearing? There are moments that you think of the body or your leg which feels hard. But there may also be a moment that there is only hardness, nothing else. At that moment there is no mixing the hardness with the concept of body, it is just the element of hardness, only a kind of rupa presenting itself through the body-sense. This is the way to 'study' realities with awareness. Not study from books, but study as you experience different namas and rupas one at a time. Person, body, dog, tree, are not realities, because what is really there? What is really there when we see a person? You cannot see a person, only the visible, visible object is seen through the eyes. Thinking of the person: thinking is real, it is a kind of nāma. Person is not real, it is a concept or idea. Body is not real, it is a concept or idea. The body consists of many different kinds of rupa which arise and fall away. When you touch a body, hardness may appear through the bodysense, or softness, heat or cold. These are rupas which can be studied, not through thinking, but when they appear. This is the way to develop satipatthana, quite naturally, in daily life. No sitting or any special preparation is necessary.

We have lots of misunderstandings about nama and rupa. Take visible object. We think we see a tree, but that is not so. Tree does not impinge on the eye-sense. When we pay attention to shape and form it is not seeing. We have to become more and more precise. When we close our eyes, no seeing. When we open them there is a reality which experiences something through the eyes, it is the citta which sees. First we know this through thinking, but when there is study in the right way, with sati we will learn characteristics of nama and rupa more precisely. We cannot hear a dog. Only sound appears through the ears, no dog. Dog is a concept we think of. Thinking is real, the dog is not real. The Abhidhamma helps us to understand realities

and this can be a foundation for vipassanā.

You may wonder: in the suttas we read about monks who were sitting under the trees and developing jhāna . Khun Sujin (she is my good friend in the Dhamma, in Bangkok) had a short answer: 'They were sitting there already', in other words, for those monks it was natural to be there and they had already practised jhāna . The Buddha explained to them how any reality can be object of mindfulness, even the jhānacitta. And they could be aware of it since they had no intention with desire to attain jhāna , they did what was natural for them. So, this does not mean that all of us, also laypeople must sit in seclusion and develop jhāna first. Everything that is natural for us , that we must do, if we do not lead our daily life there is self (an idea of self) who is trying, no way to develop paññā.

And if you wonder: my paññā is so weak, what should I do?, the answer is: all kinds of kusala , any kind for which there is opportunity. Khun Sujin praised giving very much, she said: if we give it helps us to cling less to our property and if one clings so much to one's possessions it is even harder to eradicate the attachment to self.

When we read suttas, we can say that every sutta is a reminder for sati, even if it is not explicitly mentioned. Sati-patthana is the Buddha's teaching, and if we remember that the development of wisdom is the goal, even when not mentioned, all the sutta words can be such a very effective reminder for us. Giving is praised, why? If we accumulate giving it will help us to cling less and when paññā has been developed , it is paññā which can perform the function of detachment from self. When the Bodhisatta accumulated the perfections in dāna, sīla and bhavana, he always had in mind the highest goal which he would attain once.

The sotāpānnā has eradicated all stinginess, he is truly a 'believer', that is, someone with saddha, with unshakable confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha. This is in the following sutta, Gradual Sayings, Book of the Threes, Ch V, par. 42, Characteristics:

Monks, a believer is to be recognized by three characteristics. What three?

He desires to see the virtuous; he desires to hear Saddhamma;¹⁾ with heart free from the taint of stinginess he dwells at home, a generous giver, clean handed, delighting in giving up, one to ask a favour of, one who delights to share gifts with others. By these three characteristics a believer is to be recognized as such

¹⁾ 'Saddhamma' means the true Dhamma.

Letter from Jonothan to Ann, Jan. 1976.

... I got the impression you may be worried about making the right decision, or doing the right thing. In fact, of course, there is no 'right' decision or thing to do, nor in any absolute sense is there a 'better' decision or thing to do. Decisions are made according to our accumulations. We can, however, appreciate the importance of having kusala citta at any moment and of developing sati at any moment. Worry is akusala, so is fear, regret and all the shades of uncertainty and unease. No doubt you have in mind that you would like to be sure that what you do will be the best for your study and practice of Dhamma as well as for the satisfying^{of} other less noble purposes. But how do you know what circumstances may eventuate? How can you make that situation happen? We cannot foresee the long term course of events that our past kamma will condition as result. In fact we cannot even know the more immediate plans that our kamma has for us. In ignorance we wonder about what will be the result if...? Not realising that next month's or next year's vipāka is the result of action already performed, not the result of today's decisions. We forget the importance of developing understanding of the realities of the present moment. How valuable it is to have just a moment of sati, to see just for a moment a little more clearly one of the realities of this moment. Do you remember the sutta when the Buddha talks about a fingersnap of awareness? We spend a lot of time wondering about what we should be doing, on thinking about what we would like to do, or worrying about what we are not doing, but we have no understanding of what is actually happening at the present moment-- seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and a lot of mind-door activity. The decisions we make are just another moment of thinking, conditioned by our accumulations to do many other things too. Then we may act, but this is quite another moment, with a different moment of intention, and different realities appearing.

(Thank you, Jonothan, this is a very good reminder. I just need it now while typing it over for other friends, after a few most unpleasant experiences .Nina.)